

How Persia Created Judaism: The Rise Of Persia

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Abstract

The shah had divine authority. He was God's chosen one, and held his hand. Shahs were God's regent on earth. To justify it, they propagated monotheism in the lands they conquered. For Persians, Ahuramazda was the only true god, and each subject nation had to have one God to confirm the shah as the King of Kings—the Shahanshah. Law was important to the Persians, and even Greeks said Persians were just. The Iranian word for law “data” entered Hebrew from the Persians. Two systems operated, local law based on local custom, and imperial law, the decrees of the shahanshah. Darius hoped for rule by consent and so to pass off his laws to local communities consensually as religious restoration. The great Persian scholar, A T Olmstead affirms that Darius meant to set a code of law for the whole empire. Thierry Petit noted the actions of Darius in Egypt were part of a wide program of legislation.

Tags: Zoroaster, Zarathustra, Persian Religion, Avesta, Persian History, Judaism, Jewish Religion, Saviour, Pacification by Transportation, Cyrus the Great, Deliverer of Oppressed Peoples, Darius the Great, Alexander the Great, Persian Heritage, Ahuramazda, Assyria, Assyrian, Assyrians, Babylon, Cyrus, Darius, East, Empire, God, Gods, Great, Greek, Greeks, King, Kings, Medes, Persian, Persians, Religion, Syria

Those who do not remember the past are condemned to relive it.

Santayana

As the religion of a great empire, Zoroastrianism exerted its widest influence, notably on the Jews, contributing thus to shaping the beliefs and hopes of a large part of mankind.

Mary Boyce

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Persian History

The Medes and Persians had roamed slowly over several hundred years from the steppes to the Iranian plateau but they had been preceded 1000 years before by earlier bands of Aryans who had found an opportunity to advance into the near east when the Sumerian Empire staggered just before Hammurabi, the Amorite, steadied the central power in Mesopotamia about 1700 BC. When this power then collapsed the Aryans wasted no time in advancing further.

The empires of Sumer and Akkad did not stretch politically to India but culturally they did to judge by artefacts found in the Indus valley. Strong states in the valley of the Tigris and Euphrates apparently extended a benign cultural stability to the east also. Their collapse therefore left a large gap vulnerable to the invaders from the north and east. Eventually the Kassites grew and spanned the Hittites, also Indo-European invaders.

Before the start of the last millennium BC, the Phrygians, Armenians, Thracians and Mycenaean Greeks had invaded the Aegean area and Asia Minor and eroded the Hittite empire. Like the Medes and Persians, the Greeks and the Philistines, all of these were Indo-Europeans. The Greeks knew of the Medes and Persians at an early date and they both appear in Greek mythology as Perseus and Medea.

Conceivably these Indo-European tribes were part of the same invasion, perhaps through the Caucasus to Anatolia where the Greeks moved west while the Medes and Persians moved east. In myth, Medea is associated with Colchis at the end of the Black Sea, in the Caucasus. Her uncle is Perses, mythical founder of the Persian nation, and her son, the mythical founder of the Medes, is Medus. Perseus cuts off the head of Medusa and fathers Perses by Andromeda.

In the early centuries of the last millennium BC the Semitic Assyrians under their clever and aggressive military leaders began to set up a universal state centred in Mesopotamia. The Assyrian king, Shalmaneser III, first mentions Parsua when recording his campaigns on his black obelisk of 843 BC. Shalmaneser also ravaged Mahi Dasht extracting tribute from 27 Persian chiefs as far as the land of the Medes.

The Assyrians linked together the Parsuans, the Medes and the Mannaeans suggesting that all were in the region of modern Iranian Kurdistan. Parsua was the next country to the east of Assyria in a line between Nineveh and Egbatana. The Medes were further away on the Iranian plateau up to the salt desert. The Medes were considered the more dangerous to the Assyrians and are mentioned constantly in records at the time of Ashurbanipal (668-627 BC).

The basis of the economy on the Iranian plateau at the beginning of the first millennium BC was the class of small landowners and stockholders who grew crops and reared horses and cattle (*GHIRS-I*). The social system was similar to that in Greece described by Homer.

Barons or princes held single towns or small regions and ruled some nobles, some land-owning free men, some landless free men and some slaves.

These barons were forced to pay tribute to the Assyrians, whose records suggest that the Parsuans were a static population in the ninth and eighth centuries. The core culture of the Mesopotamian peoples was common, and this long static period as neighbours of the Assyrians would explain why Persians were not ignorant strangers or wild savages. They were familiar with the culture that they had been adjacent to for hundreds of years and became its descendants. Sometime in the 200 years after Shalmaneser III, the Persians migrated or were deported south east along the valleys of the Zagros Mountains until they settled in the ancient area called Elam. The decline of the Assyrians facilitated this move.

The eastern Medes remained free of Assyria and set up their own kingdom in 711 BC, under Huakhshathra Daiukku—Uaksatar to the Assyrians and Deioces to the Greeks. Sargon II (721-705 BC) had Daiukku transported to Syria as punishment for helping the king of Urartu (Ararat). Persian art, architecture and irrigation suggests at some stage they were subject to, or allies of, the kingdom of Urartu (Ararat), to the north of Assyria in the region of Lake Van. Urartian craftsmen seem to have sheltered in Media and influenced arts in the new kingdom. Another view is that a relative of Daiukku sought a confederacy with the eastern Medes, as a result of the punishment of his family, and this became the Median kingdom.

Sennacherib (692 BC) forced an alliance which included Parsua with other allies from around Elam, implying that Parsua was also in that area much nearer the gulf. Another of the allies was Anshan, the country that Cyrus the Great tells us his ancestors ruled, and a Kurash (Cyrus), king of Anshan, appears in the Assyrian records for 640 BC. Since Anshan was ruled by the kings of Elam until 692 BC, it looks as though the country of Anshan was obliged to be yielded up to the Persians who moved bodily from Parsua to Anshan renaming the land Pars (Fars). It looks almost like another Assyrian deportation, but deportations were of troublesome populations not allies, so we have to assume that the Persians continued their migration. The alternative is that Persians had settled in several different areas.

The desiccated Iranian plateau might not look too attractive compared with well watered valleys to either side, but Iranian princes owned the copper, iron and lapis lazuli mines and protected the Semitic merchants who plied the caravan routes to the east. The ancient center of Zoroastrianism seems to have been Bactria, a source of lapis lazuli, much valued by the Assyrians. The Medes controlled trade from the east through their town of Ragha, on their eastern border where caravans from east and west met to exchange and barter. The merchants traded in expensive goods like gold, silver, precious stones and rich clothes, so the princes who charged them for protection in crossing their lands were not badly off.

It is along this trade route that Zoroastrianism came west. Ragha was the center of dispersion of Zoroastrianism among the Medes, a fact that led to the belief that Zoroastrianism had been born there. It became a sort of Zoroastrian Mecca, Rome or Canterbury.

The extension of the skills of iron tool making and the associated demand in the eighth century gave southern Iran particularly an economic boost that contributed to the growth of Persian power. The Persians had the iron ore and gained the smelting and ironworking skills but important too was the value of readily available iron tools for cultivating the plateau and improving its productivity. The copper mines however remained important because iron did not immediately displace bronze and copper was preferred for everyday utensils and ornaments for a long time.

The Assyrians noted the plateau both as a potential danger and as a source of iron, copper and horses, and raided Iranian towns often, but usually the people had warning enough to take to the hills. When the Assyrians had taken what they wanted and departed, the people returned, rebuilt and carried on with life. The Assyrians, like the Egyptians, would boast on their stelae that a town had been razed and left lifeless, but it was rarely true.

And, the Iranians would resist, if they thought their chances were favourable. Their cavalry tactics were novel and effective, especially against the foot soldiers and chariots of the Assyrians in countryside too rugged for chariots. The Assyrians learnt about cavalry from the Persians and adapted just as the Han emperors of China had to learn from the mounted Huns and adapt to them.

The Achaemenids from the outset showed that they were experts in human psychology. They had moved through the country of the Elamites to settle in Anshan but seem not to have raised any animosity from them. The Elamite kingdom itself with its capital at Susa remained independent, but its decline gave the Persians a constant supply of educated servants for long afterwards as scribes, administrators and bureaucrats in the chancellery and royal palaces. The Elamites were an old and civilized nation, and the Achaemenids seem to have gained their support by giving them the impression that they were restoring their old kingdom. The Persians for everyday and for state occasions took to wearing the long flowing robes of the Elamites rather than the trousers and short tight tunic of the horseman. When attacked by the Assyrians the Elamite Kingdom sought assistance from the tougher Persians.

The second king of the eastern Medes however subjected the Persians about 700 BC, and ruled their cousins for about 100 years influencing them greatly. The king, Khshathrita, formed an alliance against the Assyrians with the Mannaeans, an Iranian tribe near the Caspian Sea, and the Scythians who rode in to plunder the area often. But Esarhaddon subjugated the Medes again in 672 BC.

Khshathrita was killed fighting the Assyrians and another Huakhshathra (Cyaxeres to the Greeks) succeeded him, and reorganized the army. Ashurbanipal (668-627 BC) had come to power in Assyria and punished the western Medes again, boasting of destroying 75 towns. Later in his reign he wasted Elam permanently, effectively leaving it to revive as Persia, which he did not attack, placated by the diplomacy of Kurash who thought it was wise to donate large gifts to the Assyrian royal house.

When Ashurbanipal died, Cyaxares took his chance to ally with the Babylonians, Scythians and subject Medes against Assyria, and laid waste Ashur in 614 BC. In 612 BC, Nineveh and Nimrod fell, and in 610 BC, Harran too, and Assyria had gone for good. But the savage Scythians took over the kingdom of Urartu, devastated by the Assyrians, and used it as a base for plundering everywhere around for 28 years. From 590 BC, for five years, the Scythians and Lydians allied against the Medes, but eventually lost. The Scythians were driven back across the Caucasus and the Lydians were forced to accept the Halys river as the border with Media. The Medes had now replaced the Assyrians as the northern power in Mesopotamia. Urartu and Cappadocia were now in Media.

Cyaxeres was succeeded by Astyages (Greek. Ishtuwegu, Babylonian). Herodotus said Astyages ruled all of Asia beyond the Halys, and it might have been true as far as Bactria or at least a substantial way along the highway east from Ragha. Whoever ruled Media and Persia later seemed automatically to have control of the east as far as India, so it is a reasonable conclusion that Astyages ruled Zoroastrian people.

A World State and Religion

The archaeological record to date reveals negligible evidence for specifically Iranian culture.
J Blenkinsopp, *Persia and Torah* (ed J W Watts)

The Persians were already acculturized to the Akkadian culture of the Two Rivers by the time they took on the Babylonian mantle. The Aramaean culture of Syria, at the beginning of the first millennium BC, was merging with the more warlike countries to the east, first the Assyrians and Babylonians, then the Persians and Scythians to form a world state with Aramaic as its language. By the eighth century BC, the Assyrians controlled the area. The spoken language of the Assyrian court and its bureaucracy was Aramaic—the *lingua franca* of the ancient near east.

The reasons for the spread of the Aramaic language were not only the expansion of the Aramaeans themselves into the Fertile Crescent, about the beginning of the first millennium BC. It coincided with the political expansion of the Assyrian Empire, with the consequent mixture of the political term “Assyrian” and the linguistic term “Aramaic speaker”. The Assyrian state had a policy of transferring populations, notably in the eighth century BC under Sargon II and Tiglath-Pileser III. Many defeated and captured people were moved, and Assyrians were also settled as colonists all over the ancient near east within the Assyrian hegemony. The use of the term “Assyrian” for “Aramaean” is even

found in the sixth century AD when the Talmudic rabbis speak of their Aramaic alphabet as "Ashuri".

The Aramaic language spoken and written all over the ANE came to be called Syriac in the West or Assyrian (Asori) in the East. In the second century AD, the satirist, Lucian of Samosata (in Syria), wrote a book in Greek, *De Syria Dea* (*The Syrian Goddess*). Lucian calls the people of Syria by the term Assyrian, and vice versa:

I who write am Assyrian.

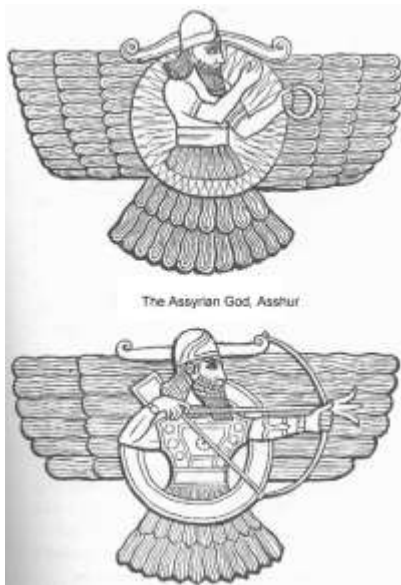
He came to Syria, but the people beyond the Euphrates did not receive him.

The Greeks considered Aramaic as the Syrian language and called those who spoke it Syrians. The biblical "Aram" is Greek and Roman "Syria". Aramaean speakers were Syrians, and later they seem often to have been identified with the Jews. Macrobius, a writer of the 5th century AD, and a pagan, wrote a book called *Saturnalia* which recalled a cult in which the Assyrii (Syrians) dedicated offerings to the sun in the village of Heliopolis (modern Baalbek). The Armenian author, Moses of Chorene, has "Asori" as a synonym of "Chaldaean" meaning Aramaean. Michael the Jacobite patriarch of Antioch (1166-99) says the Syriac language, Aramaic, is from Edessa (Urfa).

Dom Gregory Dix, in *Jew and Greek*, refers to Syrian culture and sees it as the source of ancient near eastern religion. He says that only two of the great "spiritual" religions of today, Confucianism and Buddhism, began outside of "Syriac" culture. He means by this Assyrian. He continues that the Persians were "heirs by adoption of the Syriac culture". The Syriac culture was the Assyrian culture, and the language they spoke was Aramaean. The Persians were greatly influenced by the centuries they were in contact with the Assyrians but only adopted the Aramaean language about half way through the lifetime of their great empire, and not any Aramaean religion. Cyrus had his religion at the outset.

The general historical trend to the world state was not altered by the change of central power when the Persians became leaders after the Mesopotamians. The Persians had been students of the Assyrians in the several hundred years that they had taken to move into Iran, and they or their allies the Indo-European Scythians had been mercenaries of the Assyrians. The refined culture and science of the long established civilisations of Syria and Mesopotamia merged with the vigour and technical innovations of the warlike Aryan invaders from the north.

Dix writes that Zoroastrianism, Mithraism and the solar monotheism of Akhenaten "appear" to have been born under Syriac influence. Perhaps they would "appear" thus to a Catholic monk, who believed the myths of Moses, but "appear" betrays nothing other than an opinion. When the myths of the Jewish scriptures are recognized as fiction then Judaism can no longer rival Zoroastrianism in antiquity and proper priorities can be established.



A world state was the way of enforcing stability and was obviously welcomed by most people, but especially trading peoples and those making specialized products for trade. Besides the use of military and administrative means of control, such empires depended on the propagation of a universal religion. The Assyrian universal state that the Persians took over, with the brief interlude of Babylon, had a god called Ashur (Asshur, Assur) who was depicted as a man rising from a winged solar disc and shooting a bow or offering a ring, often thought to be a diadem or coronet but probably symbolising a bond (like a wedding ring) or covenant such as we find often in the Hebrew scriptures. The Persian god, Ahuramazda, was depicted in a similar way as a man rising head and shoulders above a solar disc also offering a ring, or sometimes apparently a blessing.

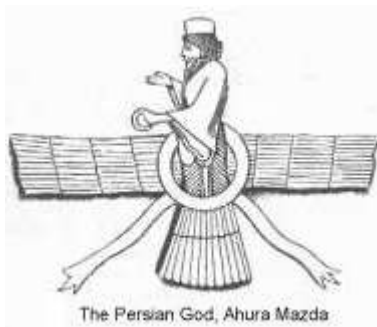
Ahura is the Persian rendering of Vedic *asura* which is uncommonly like *Ashur*, though the Assyrian language was Semitic. J H Moulton, who knew something about these things, agreed with Dr Martin Gemoll who proposed in 1911 that Ahuramazda was the same god as Ashur.

John A Tvedtnes, in an article in *J Near Eastern Studies* 40 (1981) rejected the long-accepted statement of Herodotus (*Histories* 7.63) that "Syrian" was the Greek way of saying "Assyrian". Tvedtnes proposed that Syria is derived from Hurri, an old Egyptian word for the Hurrians, which in Coptic would have changed to Suri. Richard N Frye says the vocalization of the word Syria and the supposed Middle Egyptian word "Suri" do not favour the hypothesis.

Both Tvedtnes and Frye can be right in a sense if Syrian equates with Assyrian as Herodotus says but both of them are at source the same as Hurrian. The Greeks first used the term Syrian at the beginning of the seventh century BC for the people of Cilicia and Cappadocia. Herodotus says that Syrians are called Cappadocians by the Persians. Cappadocia is in Anatolia not Assyria or Syria. It is the centre of the area settled by the

tribes called Hurrians who were the same race as the Mitanni whose brief empire was centred in Syria, near Harran.

There seems probable philological connexions between Assyria, Syria, Surya (Indic sun), Assur, Asura, Ahura, Hurri and biblical Horites and Hivites. All might be connected with the sun or brightness, and Lordship, and perhaps hills and highlands, sun worship being often conducted in high places.



The solar nature of the disc is clear in the picture of Ashur offering the ring but, in the picture of him with a bow and in the picture of Ahuramazda, the ring is plainly a symbolic girdle, presumably the equivalent of the Zoroastrian Kusti girdle. Did Assyrians have the same custom of wearing a girdle as the Persians? A tasselled cord is plain on their depictions of people. Ahuramazda is said to wear the heavens as his Kusti girdle and in the depictions of him it will be the circle of the ecliptic, the circle of the zodiac. Since the Indians also wear a sacred cord, it seems that the Assyrians had adopted Aryan customs, presumably from an earlier Aryan invasion—perhaps the Hurrians or Mitanni.



Already in the first century of the second millennium BC, the kings of Assyria were being called Ashur and were adopting the bow and arrows as a sign of office and the handed-over-ring as a sign of favour by gods and goddesses. A god called "Assara Mazas" has been noted in Assyrian lists of gods. Mazda appears in the names of Medes from about 700 BC.

Ashurbanipal took the hands of Sin and Ninku at Harran, according to a royal inscription. It echoes the practice of the monarch taking the hand of Bel Marduk at the Babylonian new year ceremonies and copied by Cyrus. These observations hint at syncretic tendencies in these religions, and it is interesting to speculate whether Bel-Marduk, the god of Babylon, had also begun to take on universal characteristics at this time.

Cyrus accused the king of Babylon of neglecting Marduk, the *great universal god*. Of course, Cyrus was intent on giving universal qualities to all of the principle gods of his conquests, and this was perhaps merely the start of it for Marduk, but the earlier Babylonian kings might have seen Marduk in a similar light. Berosus says Medes ruled Babylon for up to 200 years giving some credence to the idea, but Berosus was not reliable in his lists of kings.

The Assyrians, in the west, at any rate, seemed to regard Sin as a universal god. S W Holloway claims the “locally manufactured glyptics symbolizing the cult of Sin at Harran proliferated in the western arm of the Fertile Crescent” showing that the Assyrians must have been promoting the spread of the cult.

It is historically probable that the spread of the moon god cult of Harran by Assyria was a self-conscious act of imperial statecraft, designed to foster the acceptance of a cult whose pantheon was understood as protecting and legitimizing Assyrian interests in the West...

The equivalent of the cross, Constantine’s “in hoc signo vinces” for the Assyrian kings in the West was the lunar crescent of the moon god.

This lunar crescent symbol had been found by 1993 at fourteen stratified sites in Palestine and Transjordan—at Hazor, Tell Kusan, Tell es Samak, Megiddo and Tell Doshan, Samaria, Gezer, Tell en Nasbeh, Tell Jemmah, Horbat Uzza, Nebo and Taliwan. An unstratified example of a seal stamp was found at Gezer, showing a lunar crescent and a pendant star, datable by eponym to 649 BC and declared as belonging to Netanyahu, a name indicating the god Yehouah.

Religion was used for political purposes by ancient kings in the near east. Indeed, that probably is its purpose!

In reorganizing the cult, the king sought to bring the total life of the nation under the domain of the national deity. The king built a temple for the nation’s god and constructed a palace for himself as the god’s earthly regent. He established sanctuaries as cultic and administrative centers and created other structures for storage and security. He appointed private and other civil servants to implement royal policy, and deployed military personnel. He fixed the religious calendar and fulfilled the cultic duties of the head of state. Thus “religion was an arm of royal administration”.

Carl D Evans here summarises, in a few sentences, Gosta Ahlström’s *Royal Administration and National Administration in Ancient Palestine*, ending with a quotation from it that epitomizes the work and what should have been obvious to all historians.

Yet, Steven W Holloway who has carefully studied the Assyrian cults in a biblical connexion declares that the Assyrian foreign service were not interested in the cultic practices of their vassals and their provinces, unless they might have political consequences.

Since it would be hard to know whether there was a political implication in cultic practices without first taking an interest in them, we can assume that they were interested in them all, initially, and only lost interest in those that offered no likely challenges. The Urartians or Chaldeans in the hills to the north of the Assyrian steppes had shown they were a danger to the Assyrians who accordingly had a keen interest in stopping the Chaldeans from using their temple to their god Chaldi at Musasir. A puppet king Urzana was appointed to Musasir with instructions not to let the officials and the king of Urartu use the temple.

Richard Frye of Harvard (*The Heritage of Persia*) thought the Persian kings had a concept of "One World" and the "fusion of all people and cultures" in one "Oecumen" was their important legacy, inherited by Alexander, the Romans and the Arabs. In ancient times "culture" essentially was religion.

Pacification by Transportation

Transportation of populations has long been used for pacification. In Egypt, at the time of Amenhotep II (1453-1419 BC) and Thutmose IV (1419-1386 BC), these pharaohs deported about 80,000 Canaanites, many from Gezer. Amenhotep III (1386-1349 BC) fortified Gezer and other cities in Palestine to hold the royal garrisons. He provided these cities with fine temples and palaces. The Canaanites will have been moved to outposts in Nubia or Libya, and Nubians or Libyans were probably moved into Canaan. So, the leaders of the native populations were removed and others were transported in to replace them.

In the eighth century, the Assyrians had a warrior leader, Tiglath-Pileser III, who proved to be a great pacifier of troublesome populations. His policy was to set up colonies, claiming to be saving the colonized people, then to deport the leading elements of a colony to another colony elsewhere. Thus the bulk of the population left behind were leaderless and lacked necessary skilled people and the clever and perhaps dangerous people who were uprooted were planted hundreds of miles away in the midst of a hostile population. Thus 65,000 Medes were deported to Diyala near modern Baghdad and were replaced by Aramaeans.

In Israel, Tiglath-Pileser deposed the native king and replaced him with a vassal called Saviour or Salvation (Hosea), proof that the action of the invader was presented as a deliverance (*2 Kg* 15:29-30). *2 Kings* 17:3 tells us that later Hosea was paying tribute to Shalmaneser but eventually sought an alliance with Egypt and was deposed by the Assyrian king. When Sargon (Sharru-Kin) II captured Samaria (biblical Israel) he

implemented the policy of transportation, moving 30,000 Israelites to other parts of the empire, some of them to Halah near Haran and Habor on the upper Euphrates, others to Rhages near Teheran, the "cities of the Medes" of *2 Kings*.

He replaced them with people transported in from Cuthah in Babylonia and Avva, Hamath and Sepharvaim in Syria. These people incur the anger of the writer of *2 Kings* for worshipping their own gods, despite them also taking up the worship of the native god, Yehouah. It seems a safe guess that the displaced ruling class of Israel did the same in the lands in which they settled in the Assyrian plains and Syria. They will therefore have taken up the worship of Ashur, who was the god of the earlier race of Indo-Europeans that ruled in Assyria. This might be why an apparently Semitic people, the Assyrians, seemed to worship a god of the Aryans, similar to Ahuramazda.

The Median prince Daiukku, called by Herodotus, Deioces, possibly founder of the kingdom of the Medes, was deported with his extended family to Syria. The tribes of the Medes were called "Bit" so-and-so, meaning the house of so-and-so, like the Semitic habit ("beth", "beit"), so the House of Deioces was lost just as the ten houses of Israel were supposedly lost.

New waves of Indo-Europeans were crossing the Caucasus—the Cimmerians and the Scythians who lived by plunder. The Cimmerians entered Asia Minor and ended the kingdom of the Phrygians led by king Midas. However Ashurbanipal defeated and dispersed them into the general horde of Scythian invaders. These new bandits from the north promised to ally with the Medes to attack Nineveh but took advantage of the absence of the Median king to take over his country, which was then ruled by Scythians for possibly 30 years.

Using Media as a base the Scythians attacked Assyria, then rampaged on through Syria and Palestine, stopping at Egypt only because they were offered a lot of gold to go away. Biblical scholars like to think Jeremiah's description (*Jer* 4:13) of chariots like whirlwinds and horses swifter than eagles refers specifically to the Scythians, but Jeremiah speaks only of the north, which is where any such danger to Palestine would be, and he is a poet of considerable imaginative invention. His is probably a poetic description of any fearful invader from the north, Yehouah wanted to inflict on His Chosen, but particularly suits the Scythians.

Graves, dated to later than the eighth century BC, are found in Luristan in the south of the Iranian plateau that are of keen horsemen because everything found in them is portable and much of the ornamentation of the graves were bronze bits and other accoutrements of horses. Furthermore, there is no sign of any towns in the same place that could correspond to these evidently nomadic people.

Among the grave relics are depictions of a goddess and a god rather like Ahuramazda. Perhaps the goddess was Anahita (Aramaiti?) who was later known to have been revered by Persians but perhaps was at the beginning too. The subjects of the artwork are

remarkably cosmopolitan, including pictures typical of Assyria, Babylonia, Syria and Asia Minor. Belt plaques look typically Scythian. The cultural mix is what might be expected of the Scythians that had crossed the Caucasus, plundered and raided various peoples, and mixed with the Indo-European stock already present, the Medes and Persians.

Cyaxares, the Median leader, learnt the skills of the Scythians, threw off their yoke and started conquests of his own. The Assyrians had exhausted themselves with constant warfare over several centuries. Cyaxares allied with the Babylonians to defeat them and their Scythian mercenaries, and in 612 BC, Assyria disappeared from history as a world power. The authors of *Ezekiel* and *Jeremiah*, writing long after the event make their heroes “prophecy” that Assyria would be defeated by the Medes and sure enough it was!

The state of Urartu submitted to the Medes about the same time, and Lydia about 590 BC. The kings of the Medes had evidently already subdued the states to the east so their empire stretched from Anatolia almost to India with only Babylonia standing free in between.

In the middle period of Elamite history, the Anzanite dynasty rose to power after a two century dark age. From the fifth king in the line, Untash-Humban (1275-1240 BC), contemporary with Shalmaneser I of Assyria (c 1273-1244 BC), Elam increasingly faced the rising power of Assyria. Tukulti-Ninurta I of Assyria (c 1243-1207 BC) campaigned in the mountains north of Elam. The Elamites raided Babylonia, but the Assyrians asserted their power and the Anzanite dynasty came to an end. Shutruk-Nahhunte (c 1160 BC) founded a new dynasty, and Elam again grew in military status, just as Assyria declined. He captured Babylon and carried off to Susa the stela of the law of Hammurabi. But then Elamite power in Babylon was broken, and soon Elam was overrun by Nebuchadnezzar I, ending the Middle Elamite period (c 1100 BC).

Another dark age centuries long separate the Middle and Neo-Elamite periods, until Humban-nugash is king of Elam, about 740 BC. Curiously there is a mirror of the earlier period with Assyria and Elam vying with each other for influence in Babylon. Campaigning from 692 BC to 639 BC, Ashurbanipal’s armies eventually destroyed Susa. It is around this time that the Persian rulers were established in Elam, possibly as a consequence of an Assyrian deportation of Persians to rule the troublesome province.

Cyrus the Great (559-530 BC)



Dom Gregory Dix says that Herodotus recognized the sudden rise to empire of the Persians under Cyrus in 550 BC as the turning point of *Greek* history. *Second Isaiah* saw him as God's saviour of the *world!* If God's chief prophet and the world's first historian tell us that Cyrus was so important, why do modern theologians and modern historians ignore the man?

Cyrus recognized the importance of the older civilizations and wished to unite them in a world empire.
G M Cook

The Persians arrived in Parsumash, traditionally known as Anshan, sometime around 700 BC and Achaemenes founded a small kingdom nominally subject to Elam, an old country in terminal decline. Assyria had forced its choice of rulers on to the Elamites and the country was thoroughly divided between pro-Assyrian and anti-Assyrian factions. While the Scythians ruled Media, Achaemenes' son, Teispes (Chishpish), took over the province of Fars or Parsa. Teispes was a diplomat and avoided the imbroglios of the great powers, but when he died, he divided his kingdom between his two sons. A gold tablet found at Egbatana (Hamadan) in 1920, where it must have been taken with Achaemenid archives during the empire, says:

This land of the Persians which I possess, provided with fine horses and good men, was given to me by the Great God Ahura Mazda. I am the king of this land. I pray that Ahura Mazda will help me.

Aryaramnes (640-590 BC) one of the sons of Teispes, was the author. This is the earliest mention of Ahura Mazda (Ahuramazda, Ormuzd). The parallel between the Persians migrating landless for a long time then being delivered by the grace of God into a wonderful land and the mythical journey of the Israelites into their land of milk and honey should not be missed. Both have the sound of deportation propaganda.

Ultimately the two branches of the family were to be united again under the more vigorous of the Achaemenid kings though there seemed to have been no bad feeling, the subject branch carrying on as governors of what was their own country, an early example of the generosity of the Achaemenids towards losers and perhaps the influence of the Zoroastrian religion.

In Zoroastrian mythology, the king converted by Zoroaster, Vistaspa, convinced now of the support of the Good God and committed to defeating the followers of the Evil Spirit—anyone who refused to submit—set out on the “Wars of Religion”. The blessing of Ahuramazda or perhaps the novelty of fanaticism kept the Zoroastrians winning. There is no historical record of any of this, unless they are stylised versions of the victories of Cyrus, but set down in the annals, they were to be an inspiration to religious maniacs for millennia.

The Zoroastrian tradition suggested by Vishtaspa’s “Wars of Religion” enjoined on the Persian monarchs an enthusiasm for Holy Wars. It glorified the dissemination of Zoroastrianism by the sword, and the Arabs later took their cue from it, as the founder of the Persian empire Cyrus (Kurash) the Great did immediately. Herodotus confirms that his epithet was justified—he was a noble king.

Historically, Cyrus the Great became a Zoroastrian at some time in his career, for at his death Zoroastrianism was the official religion of his empire, and the Magi had attained the monopoly of religion. It was the proper religion of the Medes and Persians, so that being a Zoroastrian meant being a Persian. The two became equivalent, religion and ethnicity being identified, as they later did in Judaism.

As a devoted Zoroastrian, Cyrus believed that his religious duty was to bring about the eschatological promises of Zoroastrianism through active warfare. If the universe was an epic struggle between the forces of Ahuramazda and the forces of evil, Cyrus saw his job as personally bringing about the victory of his god. As an extension of this, Cyrus would bring Zoroastrianism to all the peoples he conquered, but not by forcing them. Zoroastrianism recognized all the gods of other people—some were of Ahuramazda’s Good Creation, and some were of Ahriman’s Evil Creation. Cyrus distinguished between them on the basis of the resistance the worshippers of the god offered him.

A scholarly Parsi, Ruhi Muhsen Afnan (*Zoroaster’s Influence on Anaxagoras, the Greek Tragedians, and Socrates*, New York, 1969), shows that expansion of the Persian Empire under the Achaemenids was motivated by a “divine mission to offer mankind” a true belief, like the wars of Islam. These wars “were dominated by a religious fervor that must be taken into account” in the sudden emergence of Persia, just as the Arabs suddenly emerged with a divine militancy and conquered most of the world.

Cyrus first refused to bow to the Medes and carefully planned to defeat them, thus merging the two strong Indo-European tribes of the plateau. Typically, he treated the defeated median king, Astyages, with generosity. Defeating the Medes gave him a ready

made empire from Asia Minor to the Caspian Sea, with Babylonia ruling to the south. He moved his capital immediately from Persis to Egbatana, taking the royal archives with him.

Asia Minor, including the Ionian Greek cities, were subject to the wealthy kingdom of Lydia ruled by the legendary Croesus. Croesus was too rich and proud to bow to the upstart so was defeated in battle and had to yield to the new power in the near east. The Greek cities saw this as a chance of independence and also refused homage and were duly individually beaten or bribed into submission. Miletus was the only city to yield readily, and must have had some privileges as a reward. Herodotus notes the name Oromedan, a citizen of Cilicia about 540 BC, just about the time Cyrus subjected Anatolia. Oromedan is a Greek rendering of Ahuramazda.

So, from the earliest days of the Persian empire, Greeks were a part of it. They were soldiers, merchants and entrepreneurs and were vital to this very young country from its coming out into the world. It is childish school learning that depicts the Greeks as defenders of teutonic Europe against the Asian hordes. Greeks were serving in the armies of the Persians, and not just as infantry—as generals too.

Cyrus turned east to secure his boundaries there, facing India and particularly the north east where armed bands from central Asia liked to gallop in to plunder. In each case of conquest, Cyrus allowed the defeated country to continue with its normal culture and practices, and left most of the officials in post. He knew he did not have enough trained men to administer all his conquered territories. It was a dangerous but necessary policy. Meanwhile he founded a college of seven Persian princes and later many more Persian nobles would be trained for colonial administration.

Cyrus was always astute enough to realize that most people he was conquering were far more cultured than his own, and made no attempt to impose a Persian “culture” nor was he interested in directly forcing the Persian religion on to others. He thought, though, that the universal god, Ahuramazda, was favouring him, his house and the Persian nation, and he was keen that people should see some god as universal so that the idea of a universal god would confer legitimacy on the idea of a universal king of kings on earth.

Cyrus still had a strong and rich country independent at the centre of his empire and decided it had to be made to submit. Chaldeans [\[†\]](#) were a Semitic people who invaded Southern Babylonia in the early centuries of the first millennium BC, while the Aramaeans occupied Syria. Chaldaea is first mentioned in the annals of the Assyrian king Ashurnasirpal II (883-859 BC). When they ruled Babylonia, after the Assyrians, they followed the practice of their predecessors, pacifying people by deportation including part of the Judahite [\[†\]](#) population, supposedly 10,000 nobles and craftsmen. It is doubtful that many, if any, of these people or their descendants willingly returned to

Palestine, but the people who themselves were deported into Palestine by the Persians, a hundred or so years later, were nevertheless called the "Returners from Exile".

Cyrus returned from the east in 539 BC determined to settle the Chaldaean question. Nabonidus (Nabunaid) (555-539 BC), was apparently a cultured but loopy king, interested in the worship of the god, Sin—neglecting Babylon's principal god, Marduk, who symbolized the city as well as the faith of its people—and in archaeological research, and quite uninterested in warfare, which he left to his son, Belshazzar. Cyrus had a large army with Medes and Persians at the core but lots of soldiers of conquered nations in support. He needed no army. Babylon submitted and only a few days of token resistance came from the guard of the royal compound. As ever, Cyrus was generous to the defeated king and his family, but Nabonidus died a year later anyway. Cyrus joined in the public mourning.

The victory over Babylonia expressed all the facets of the policy of conciliation which Cyrus had followed until then. He presented himself not as a conqueror, but a liberator and the legitimate successor to the crown. He took the title of "King of Babylon, King of the Land".

Cyrus made cylinder seals and inscribed tablets with declarations of his treatment of and welcome by the Babylonians. He entered Babylon "amidst exulting shouts". His victory was "desired to the joy of their hearts" and "him did they bless with joy". Then, "Marduk the great Lord made the honourable hearts of the people of Babylon inclined towards me because I was daily mindful of his worship" "the inhabitants realized the satisfaction of their hearts desires" and "their sighs I hushed, their anger I appeased".

If Cyrus said all of this regarding Marduk and the Babylonians, it is credible that a similar tactic should have been employed in respect of the Jews, and indeed many other people, the evidence of which is now lost. Cyrus claimed to have been visited in a dream by Yehouah, a god of the Hebrews, the people who lived in "Beyond the River", the Assyrian province of "Eber-niri" (Persian "Abarnahara"). Yehouah declared he was of the Good Creation and asked to be worshipped in the land of Yehud. The Jewish scriptures, not an unbiased source, tells us that Cyrus sent the "Returners from Exile" there to introduce the proper worship of Yehouah in the Temple at Jerusalem.

Thus saith Yehouah to his messiah, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him, and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates, and the gates shall not be shut.

Isaiah 45:1

Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, Yehouah Elohim of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.

Ezra 1:2

"Yehouah Elohim of heaven" means "Yehouah of the gods of heaven" not "The Lord God of heaven" as the dishonest translators will put it. For Indo-Europeans, the gods of

heaven are the Daevas, the wicked gods derogated by Zoroaster. It seems the Persians saw all national gods as Daevas, but were ready to allow their worshippers to show by their deeds that they were really Yazatas, good spirits.

In fact no one, or very few volunteers went there and later kings were obliged to send deportees to shore up Jerusalem as a citadel against the Egyptians. It was set up as a temple City in which the people, a Nation of Priests, were privileged in return for their loyalty.

The Reverend Mills recognized that ancient politicians were sensible of propaganda. He comments on the propaganda of Cyrus: "All this piety was of course political" but still showed the Persian king as a man of faith. When Cyrus flooded the empire with these cylinder seals and inscriptions, he knew that they would be read by the literate and repeated by story tellers for a long time. He knew they would become the stuff of legends. Mills observes:

The empire was as complex in its religious types as it was vast in extent, and the amount of business entailed in administering it must have been phenomenal.

Beyond a question there existed a "Ministry of Public Worship".



The objective of this ministry was to make a show of restoring gods and temples to please the peoples of the nations, but it is utterly naïve to imagine that the "restoration" had no strings attached or was simply restoration of an ancient worship rather than its "improvement" in the sense of arranging it in a form more conducive to civil obedience. No subtle king could miss the chance to cast the restoration in a direction favourable to himself. As Mills says:

These Achaemenids were men of business and practical to the finest point.

Darius took the same line but was more keen on monumental inscriptions than Cyrus. His main legacy is the immense carved cliff face at Behistun but other inscriptions are at Persepolis, Naksh-e Rostam, Elvend, Kerman, Susa, Suez, Van and Egbatana, as well as on seals, tablets, pillars, weights and vases. Mills points out that "what the great Iranian inscriptions said, all officers of the king's government must have known".

Cyrus the Deliverer of Oppressed Peoples

The interesting thing was that Cyrus offered himself to the Babylonians as a deliverer or Saviour (in Greek, *Soter*), just as he did to the Judahites. He said Babylon's god, Marduk-Bel, had chosen him, Cyrus, as a righteous king who would rule the world. To prove it he ritually took the god's hand at the new year festivities, thus legitimising him in the official title of the Babylonian king—"king of the land" of Babylon. Marduk-Bel was offered to his own worshippers in a new light—as a god with a world outlook not merely a local one.

Cyrus told the Babylonians that earlier kings, like Nabonidus, had taken their gods from their rightful homes and he promised to "restore" them. Nabonidus had used exactly the same approach in Harran when he persuaded the people he deported to the town that the proper god of the city was Sin. Even then the policy was not new. An inscription of Hammurabi who rules in Babylon from 1792 to 1750 BC speaks of him restoring to its rightful place the god who favoured the city of Assur.

Persians called Cyrus "Father", Greeks "Lord" or "Master", and "Law-Giver", and Jews called him "Messiah". Greek writers like Aeschylus depict the Persian king as a god, and Curtius Rufus has a sycophant encouraging Alexander the Great to accept divine honours by assuring him the Persians had worshipped their kings among the gods. It was not true. They did not and no Persian king claimed to be a god, but they did like to depict themselves as god-like. They had a doctrine equivalent to the divine right of kings. The shah had divine authority. He was king by virtue of God's will. He was God's chosen one, and held his hand. Shahs were God's regent on earth, and if that meant some people thought they were an angel of God, doubtless they would be hardly likely to send an envoy to correct their misconception. They showed themselves larger than men and, as it were, conversing with God. To justify it, they propagated monotheism in the lands they conquered. The shah ruled with divine authority, and that authority was that of God—one single monotheistic God. For Persians, Ahuramazda was the only true god, and each subject nation had to have an equivalent of Ahuramazda to be able to confirm the shah as the King of Kings—the Shahanshah.

Historians like to say Cyrus had "no thought of" moulding conquered countries in a Persian mould. That was perhaps true and realistic, but Ahuramazda was always depicted as a god rising above the solar or equinoctial disc, implying that the Persians saw him as transcendental, and certainly Cyrus was interested in persuading people that the true god was universal in outlook. His purpose seems to have been practical and political rather than religious, but it was a policy that led to all the main patriarchal religions of today. Cyrus was the founder of the modern great religions!

His novel and clever policy of conquest was to be generous to defeated people. In his propaganda he painted himself as the saviour and legitimate ruler of a conquered country.

This must have been such a shock to people who expected to be massacred by conquerors that they could only conclude it was true.

Cyrus's religious policy was an extension of this practical policy—to make it seem to be God's will, whoever the local god was. He reshaped the Marduks and Yehouahs as Ahuramazdas—transcendental gods, suns beyond suns. To do so, he "restored" the local gods, but the restoration was in a mould that suited a universal king. The "restored" god was willing to look beyond his traditional worshippers to a world scale to recognize a righteous king when it saw one and approve of him in the appropriate way.

He got people to believe his propaganda by transporting them to a country that he declared was their proper homeland, where they had to start anew from the facts the Persians provided. Cyrus was their saviour, so-and-so was their rightful god, the god recognized Cyrus as the saviour—"Go thee and do likewise" and we Persians will help you.

Cyrus "restored" Yehouah to Jerusalem and supposedly 40,000 worshippers of Yehouah—Jews, for that is the name of people who worship Yehouah wherever they come from—"returned" to Jerusalem. The truth seems to be that very few did. Into the third generation of captivity and having the privileges of a deported class, the Judeans are unlikely to have wanted to return.

In the Jewish scriptures, Cyrus is presented as a saviour and an agent of God—the Jewish god, Yehouah—and is even described as the messiah (the anointed). Yehouah had used the righteous but foreign king, Cyrus, to avenge the Jews against Babylon. We even find Yehouah shaking Cyrus by the hand (*Isa* 45:1) just as Bel had done:

Thus saith the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him.

Two separate gods, Marduk and Yehouah, of people who were enemies, Babylonians and Jews, saying kind things about a foreign prince, choosing him as a deliverer and taking him by the hand in proof. It all begins to look suspicious—like pro-Cyrus propaganda. Cyrus depicted himself as the benefactor of conquered peoples and the "restorer" of gods to their rightful place.

The leaders of the "returners" were Zerubabel, supposedly a member of the Jewish royal family, and Joshua, supposedly the descendant of a dynasty of High Priests. The name Joshua means "saviour!" They were accompanied by an assortment of Persian officials.

Is it not curious that Zerubabel, a Jewish leader, should have a distinctly Babylonian sounding name, and one that in "Zeru" suggests "Zara" (Zoro), the beginning of Zoroaster's name, the latter part simply meaning Babylon? Zara pertains to the sun and seems to have connotations of "power" or "strength" and so "protecting" or "saving". Zerubabel is the "saviour from Babylon". The same is true of a later and more famous

Jewish leader to “return”, Ezra, where again we have the characteristic consonants “ZR” appearing in a language which did not write vowels, so that it could equally be rendered as Zara—another saviour!

In fact, Zerubabel was the *Tirshatha*, the Persian governor, whose duty was to act on behalf of the king, Cyrus, and whose bogus Jewish royalty was to give him authority over the skeptical natives of Judah. He is also called Sheshbazzar which seems to mean “mighty power of the king” or “citadel of the king”.

The society of Jerusalem was a feudal class system based on aristocracies called “houses” of princes and nobles, rulers and elders. The Persian governor was the top official but then came the priestly houses, led by the High Priest, a hereditary position. Sacred objects supposedly stolen by Nebuchadnezzar from the temple in Jerusalem were returned by Cyrus, but Nebuchadnezzar would have melted down or broken up any valuables to make them easier to transport, and so these were new items given by Cyrus to furnish the new temple.

AN ARCHETYPAL RETURNER

The Jewish scriptures have a remarkable clue that the Yehudim were not natives of the hill country but were from Babylon. It is the story of Abraham, supposedly the father of the Jewish race who in the legend travelled from Ur “of the Chaldees” to Judaea. Abraham was allegedly travelling about 2000 BC but the Chaldees did not exist then, it was the name of the neo-Babylonian empire at the time of the “exile” so Abraham is simply a symbolic “returner” shoved into the past anachronistically.

Historians, believing the bible rather than their inspection of the relevant documents, have said that Cyrus was kind to Jews because he found the Jewish God so impressive and akin to his own god, Ahuramazda. Most biblical scholars would not be interested in anything that cast any doubt upon the bible, and if it looked threatening, would denounce it as fraud or copying or anything else they could think off. Here the evidence is as clear as could be that Cyrus manipulated the worshippers of Yehouah that he had returned to Jerusalem, exactly as he had manipulated the worshippers of Marduk.



Before the exile, Judahites conceived of their anthropomorphic tribal God as a fertility and storm god. The earlier Yehouah had been a local god that the simple hill folk of

Palestine could easily recognize. Most called him "Baal" their word for "Lord". The **Jews** who "returned" worshipped a different Yehouah from those who had been originally deported. This Yehouah was a universal god like Ahuramazda, the Persian Most High God, who thought nothing of choosing a foreign prince as a Jewish messiah. He was good, perfect, remote and a God of righteous living—just like Ahuramazda. He was, however, also a vengeful god for those who did not live righteously. Naturally, since no one previously had known that Yehouah was like this, all of His earlier worshippers were sinners! That is why He had had His revenge, but now He had sent the Persian kings as His saviours.

Cyrus was killed on the eastern front in 530 BC and his body was laid embalmed in a tomb with a pitched roof typical of ancient Indo-European tombs. He was still there 200 years later and was seen by Alexander the Great. Evidently Cyrus was not exposed in a silent tower as the Zoroastrian religion requires, showing the Achaemenids were not strictly Zoroastrian or that this was a requirement introduced later.

Darius the Great (522-486 BC)

The son of Cyrus, Cambyses, a more ruthless man than his father completed the conquest of Egypt, ending traditional pharaonic rule for good. Following standard policy, Cambyses transported the ruling class of the Egyptians, including Pharaoh and his family, to Susa, but legitimized his rule by paying homage to the Egyptian gods. Then, so as to appear to the common people as a deliverer, he ordered the administration to introduce reforms to benefit them. While conquering Egypt he incidentally made several north African Greek colonies, like Libya and Cyrenaica to submit, thus bringing more of the Greek world into the Persian ambit.

In Egypt, Cambyses set up or sponsored a garrison of Jewish soldiers at Elephantine. According to a later letter, a temple to Yehouah had been set up here before the Persians came, and the polytheistic nature of the gods worshipped there besides Yehouah serves to confirm the idea. The name of Yehouah or Yeho as a god appears all over the Levant, not just in the Judaeian hills, and even as far south as the Sinai, which is where Yehouah first appeared to Moses in the biblical myth. So the Semitic people of the Levant had Yehouah among their other gods and expatriate Semites in Egypt had apparently set up a temple for their devotional purposes. Perhaps, though, Cambyses tried to help the "returners" to Jerusalem by conscripting leaders of the Am ha-Eretz opponents of the new Yehouah temple and deporting them to Egypt where he allowed them to set up a temple to the traditional Yehouah and his heavenly court.

Cambyses was said to have disparaged the Egyptian gods and killed the Apis Bull, but inscriptions cast doubt on this. It seems to have been Egyptian and Greek propaganda, made possible because Cambyses was soon dead, either of suicide in the face of mass uprisings or, more likely from gangrene in an accidental wound caused by his own knife (Persian nobles all wore a knife) loosing its sheath and impaling him in the groin as he

jumped on to his horse. A cousin of Cambyses, Darius, one of the seven Persian princes, seized power and, though faced with considerable opposition eventually put down the rebellions and re-united the vast Empire.

To mark his success, Darius built the large monument at Behistun between Egbatana and Kirimanshah. Ahuramazda or his fravashi, typically rising head and shoulders above a winged circlet, overlooks Darius treading over a usurper while eight other false kings trail behind in bonds. The inscription tells the story of the revolts but says "Ahura Mazda and the other gods helped me" confirming again that the Achaemenids did not consider Ahuramazda the only god, but the highest of them. Even Persis had been in revolt and Darius moved his capital to Persepolis. The dangers of the liberality of Cyrus had been proved and Darius determined to set up a much more formal and effective system of governance.

A Greek admiral was ordered to build a fleet in the head waters of the Indus and find a way to Egypt. He succeeded in 30 months. Darius wanted to secure the north and planned to invade Scythia via the Hellespont. In preparation he forced Byzantium to submit, conquered Thrace and Macedonia and moved a massive army across the Hellespont and the Danube on bridges of boats built by Ionian Greek engineers. He was ready to force the European Greeks to submit and the Athenians were happy to do so, but the Spartans objected.

Attempting to be assured of Athenian loyalty with a large bribe, the Persians came up against the paradox of democracy. The Athenians were now offended and sided with the Spartans. Meanwhile the Greeks of Ionia decided it was a good time to revolt and set up the Ionian league, supported by Athens, seizing Sardis, the Persian regional capital, except for its citadel. The Persians re-asserted themselves in 497 AD and treasure was taken and populations deported. Milesian Greeks were settled at the mouth of the Tigris where earlier the settlement of Aramaeans had helped to destabilize the country of Elam, allowing the Persians to take root. At Lesbos, young women were taken for the harems and young men were castrated, leaving the remaining women to satisfy themselves in unconventional ways.

Darius sent a fleet under a Median admiral to secure Athens. He captured the town of Eretria on Euboea and transported the citizens to Susa as slaves. They were settled at Arderikka and still spoke Greek in the first century AD, according to the supporters of Appollonius of Tyana. Their abduction was bad psychology for creative and perverse people like the Greeks and it only had the effect of again uniting them and allowing them to win the battle of Marathon (490 BC). Turning to a rebellion in Egypt, Darius died in 486 BC.

Marathon and Salamis are written off as ignominious failures for the Persians, who are depicted in history as fools and poltroons, but the inventive and creative Greeks lived on the mainland in Ionia, and were for long vassals of the Persians. All Greek achievements before the Persian wars were Ionian, and the Ionians taught the western Greeks

seamanship and citizenship. The constitution of Athens took its main clauses from those of the Ionian cities. The talent, art, main population, wealth and commerce of the Greeks were in the eastern cities, while the Balkan cities were impoverished.

That, above all, is why the Persians were not unduly interested in European Greece, and the invasions of Darius and Xerxes were less aimed at conquest than to punish the western Greeks for helping the eastern Greeks in rebellion. If they hoped to subdue the western Greeks, the Persian kings failed, but those Greek cities who did not surrender as far south as Athens were razed, and Thrace was set up as a Persian buffer in Europe. When the independent Greeks defeated the Persians at Plataea, the spoils of victory were dedicated to Apollo at Delphi as "the spoils of the Persians, the Macedonians and the Thebans" so both Macedonians and Thebans were subject to the Persians and fought with them. The Persian empire therefore began in Europe, about forty miles from Athens. Macedonia was Persian for the first half of the Persian empire's existence, and Thrace for even longer. Ionia remained a Persian colony, or in its sphere of influence.

The Persians lost some critical battles that the Greeks worked up in their propaganda, but the Persian kings considered that they had achieved most of their goals, and were able to keep the undefeated Greeks fighting each other for a hundred years until they exhausted themselves. Alexander was subject to Persian as well as Greek influences, a factor that might have been crucial to his success against the Persians.

From the time of Darius, the kings were laid in rock tombs. In his tomb inscriptions at Naqsh-e Rostam, Darius praises Ahuramazda as creator of earth, sky, man and man's happiness, and as the god who made Darius the king. The inscription lists people who were obedient to the king, through the favour of Ahuramazda, and it lists provinces where disturbances were quelled, through the grace of Ahuramazda. On it, Darius says his law did not allow the strong to strike the weak. He then lists the buildings he has erected and concludes with a prayer for Ahuramazda and "the gods" to protect him, his dynasty and his inscriptions.

Darius's inscriptions generally pray for Ahuramazda to protect the Royal House and the country from foreign armies, famine and the Lie. The "Lie" in Zoroastrianism is the equivalent of "sin" in Judaism—it is disobeying the word of God. The consequence of this in practical terms for Persian kings was that avoiding the baneful influence of the "Lie" meant, among other things, that the people would have to accept the Shahanshah as God's regent on earth. Herodotus notes that Persians never prayed for personal benefit but only for benefits for Persia—they prayed for the good of the king, the people and the country.

The Legacy of Darius

Darius realized Cyrus had been too generous—in diplomacy generosity is often taken advantage of. The policy of the Great King as protector was continued but the individual

kings were now effectively governed by the Satraps (*Khshatrapavans*)—"Protectors of the Kingdom"—a Persian noble. Darius divided the empire into twenty Satrapies to which he appointed his own loyal generals and Persian administrators, richly endowed with land and exempt from taxation. But there was no question of trying to force obedience by force of arms. The old diplomacy of Cyrus still had to be at the core but now Persians were to be the senior administrators.

Conquered lands were the property of the king, who had his lands surveyed, estimated their yields and levied a rent on what could be produced, then charged people rents for its use. So tribute or tax was technically a rent. Persians lived in their own land and so paid no rent. Satrapies and vassal states had to pay a fixed sum in talents of gold or silver to the Persian exchequer. The satrap stood alongside a local army commander and a local collector of taxes, all equal but independent and reporting only to Darius. Thus local power was divided. As extra safeguards, the satrap had an official secretary whose task was to record everything that the satrap did and report it to the emperor. Finally, Darius also appointed inspectors—"Ears of the King"—whose job was to call unexpectedly on any area official to check what he was doing. He had an independent small force of armed men to protect himself and enforce his actions if needs be.

The royal inscriptions of Persian kings often mentioned Truth or Order, and Justice, "*arta*" and "*asha*", and "*data*" meaning law as the order ("*arta*") brought to the world by the king's will. The Iranian word for law "*data*" entered Hebrew and other Semitic languages of the ancient near east, at the time of the Persian conquest. Law was important to the Persians, and even Greeks said Persians were just. Famous stelae of law like that found in Babylon, together with the moral code of his own religion, inspired Darius to set down just laws. Persian judges held office for life as long as they were not corrupt. Two court systems operated in Babylon—and doubtless elsewhere—the local law based on local custom and practice, and the imperial law, the decrees of the shahanshah. Babylonian and Aramaic sources call imperial Persian judges "*databar*". Rule by consent was still aimed for, and Darius hoped for rule by consent and thus to pass off his laws to local communities consensually under the guise of religious "restoration". The great Persian scholar, A T Olmstead affirms that Darius meant to set a code of law for the whole empire, and more recently Thiery Petit noted that the actions of Darius in Egypt were only a part of an empire wide program of subtle legislation.

In Egypt, Darius had the rules and immunities granted by the pharaohs to the temples "codified" and made available in Demotic and Aramaic script. The Ptolemaic regime in Egypt was started by Alexander's general, Ptolemy, only ten years after the defeat of the Persians. The Ptolemies were keen on preserving the written word, and began the collections of the Alexandrine library. The reverse of one Ptolemaic papyrus bearing the *Demotic Chronicle*, dated to the third century BC, carried an account of Darius setting up a commission of priests, sages and warriors to "codify" Egyptian law. It says it took 16 years to report. In fact, Diodorus Siculus had already given Darius credit for being one of the Egypt's main lawgivers, and the Egyptian satrap, Arsames, had the same honour.

Curiously, the text specifies that Darius made no innovations. Why should it make this point explicitly unless Darius was keen that no one should imagine he had done so? No codification of the law can be done while leaving it unchanged. The whole point of a code of law is that it should be systematic and therefore easier to use—law is codified for use, not as an idle pursuit, and it is hard to believe that practical rulers like the Persian shahs will have wanted to waste sixteen years on a project that would not give them some direct benefit. Someone must have suspected that the “codification” was indeed to make legal innovations, and so it must indeed, but the king was keen to stifle any such impression.

Cambyses had the reputation of having openly interfered with the Egyptian temples, and Darius wanted his own propaganda to counter any such thought by meretriciously proclaiming this shah had no intention of doing the same as his predecessor. Egyptians were not used to be subjects of foreigners, and many thought they had the wealth and power to declare UDI. In short, flagrant legal changes in a country that was notionally as powerful as its conqueror could have caused dangerous rebellion. A hand-picked commission of the good and the great taking sixteen years to report did just what any modern government commission does—it allowed plenty of time for tempers to cool, and changes to operate before any report emerged. But, if the changes made by Cambyses had been so badly received, why did Darius not simply reverse them, thus getting great kudos as a righter of wrongs? That is what he did not do. If Cambyses thought Egyptian laws were better for the Persians changed, Darius will have felt the same way. By making “no innovations”, Darius did not have to reverse the legal changes Cambyses had made. So, Diodorus tells us Darius “dealt with” the priests, by bribes and the delay in codifying the legal content of holy books.

The Persians were well aware people had their price, and the privileges of the priests would have been secured as long as they were cooperative. In the process of codification, many a clause will have been inserted favourable to Persian rule that no priest could object to if simply because no one knew the full corpus of religious law anyway! He also restored the Houses of Life, the schools and hospitals, attached to the temples. He was doing the same in Egypt as he did elsewhere. At Magnesia on the Meander river in Ionia, a satrap was rebuked for trying to curtail the privileges of the priests of Apollo. Persian kings, as in Jerusalem, were keen to have the priesthood on their side.

The introduction of a law book by a commissioner empowered for that purpose was not possible unless the central government approved of its contents.

P Frei, *Persia and Torah* (Ed J W Watts)

Besides these legal and administrative reforms, Darius built a fine road network, only patches of which now remain. The Royal Road from Susa to Sardis in Asia Minor was 1600 miles long and could be traversed by caravan in 90 days, but post stations every 15 miles kept fresh relays of horses for the king’s couriers who could cover the distance in seven days. Such good roads and sound administration encouraged commerce.

The royal road was said to pass for its whole length “through country that is inhabited and safe”. This great highway made much of central Asia Minor accessible to Iranian colonists, who were attracted by its fertile river-valleys and wide plains. Noble fiefholders naturally had an interest in developing their estates, and this interest was quickened in them as Zoroastrians, for whom good cultivation of the land is a religious duty.

A Persian landowner in Lydia dwelling in a fortified manor house on his own estate, had armed retainers in his service, as well as slaves to work the land. His house was attacked by Greek raiders and a beacon was lit which brought a Persian neighbour to his aid, with his own body of fighting men, and some official forces also, and the marauders were driven off. The incident suggests a number of Persian estates in this, and doubtless other, fertile regions of western Asia Minor, with mutual support among the landowners and in general effective Persian vigilance and control.

Persian nobles must have brought skilled farmworkers with them from Iran, for still, in the fourth century AD, many villages scattered about Cappadocia were entirely inhabited by Iranians, descendants of the original colonists. Achaemenid armies were generally accompanied by women, and the long survival of some of these settlements must owe much to their being ethnically and culturally homogeneous, founded by Iranian families.



Another practical policy adopted by the Persians and useful to commerce and diplomacy alike was to use the popular and widespread language, Aramaean, rather than Persian as a *lingua franca*. Few people in the world at the dawn of the Achaemenid age knew Persian and, since it was not a written language, a special script now called Old Persian script was invented from Assyrian cuneiform script. The kings used it on inscriptions but for pragmatic reasons they used Aramaean otherwise, and helped to spread it as far as India.

Mesopotamian languages after the Sumerians were all Semitic and Aramaean was Syrian Semitic which gradually spread naturally then got a boost when the policy of transportation was introduced. Many Aramaean speakers were transported into the areas of Old Sumeria and Elam, as well as elsewhere, and it became the language everyone picked up a bit of, until it became the language everyone spoke. Significantly, the traditional script of the Hebrew language is this Aramaean script introduced by the Persians, and it differs from the Old Hebrew script used by the Samaritans.



A Persian Daric

The Persian empire above all improved commerce. The Persians introduced standard taxation, introduced coinage, first used by king Croesus of Lydia. Persian coinage did not catch on everywhere, so Darius introduced accurate weights and measures to ensure fair trading. They are however mentioned in the Jewish scriptures (*1 Chr* 29:7) where king David's nobles offer Persian darics (*adarkons*, translated "drams" in KJV) for the upkeep of the temple. This is almost 500 years before darics were invented, but shows when and by whom the myth of David was written. Darics were gold coins but a lesser silver coin was called by a Babylonian word, segals—shekels.

Darius employed people in public works in mines, roadmaking and canal digging, drained swamps, spread useful animals and plants including domestic fowl and doves, promoted other useful activities in foodstuffs like the drying and pickling of fish so that it could be transported inland. They took pistachios to Aleppo, sesame to Egypt and rice to Mesopotamia. Persian kings were interested in public welfare. Later, the Greek kings continued this policy.

The standard of living rose throughout and was higher in the centres of Persia than it was in the Greek cities we so much admire. Partly this was because the greater volume of trade and enterprise took goods downmarket that had previously been the exclusive interest of the rich. More people benefited and standards as a whole rose. Banking boomed also. Banking had traditionally been the prerogative of the temples in, for example Babylonia, but there were private bankers too. It was private banking that boomed, although the general swell of wellbeing spread so far as Greece and the temples of Delos, Delphi and Olympia all opened as banks based on Asian models. The role of the Temple of Jerusalem as a private bank in which the simple deposit their money as "corban" and the priesthood drew it out is well known!

Darius specified fair wages for workers and, since wages were often paid in kind, the values of standard goods were also specified so that the worker knew they were getting the right weight. Some serfs were tied to the estates but many were free and workers moved around in an extensive labour market. Tablets at Persepolis speak of workers from all over the empire. There must have been a labour exchange. There was certainly

an imperial direct labour force working on palaces, temples and other large projects for the king. After 520 BC, Persian names are increasingly found in the city rolls of Babylonia, a result of the displacement of Persian smallholders from the plateau by the larger more efficient estates.

Deportations continued and some were depicted as having been voluntary. Herodotus tells of Milesians transported from Ionia to the Persian gulf to establish sea-going routes to India and Egypt but little impression was made, perhaps simply because the wood to make ships was not readily available. The Peonians of Thrace were deported to Phrygia by Darius, but Herodotus says that many were shortly able to escape back home during an uprising encouraged by the Greeks.

Alexander used the same policy after the end of the Persian empire and, in the second century BC, it was still being used by the Parthians. Mithradates II transported Scythians into Seistan, now on the border of Iran and Afghanistan.